

Who Are You? part 1

Colossians 3: 23 Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.

What is your life's purpose? What is it that you do?

For many of us, primarily with men, at least in our North American culture our identity is what our profession or title is. For women, their identity generally relates to their family, such as mother or wife, or of course they can be career-minded as well. When you meet someone for the first time, how do you identify yourself? Who do you say that you are? When you part ways, what is it that you want them to remember you by? Is it "Oh, that was John the accountant.", "That was Mary an Orthopedic Surgeon.", Or "Did you know that Jonas is a regional vice president?" Is your main focus on communicating to people what you do or who you are?

Have you ever thought about it? Or is that just what you learned how to say to people from spending time with others?

As a man who spent many hours in business networking, this is something I'm very familiar with. In business networking, the name of the game is to promote what you do, the niche that you fit, and to make sure that you communicate it well so that the other person would leave the conversation knowing what you can do for them. Can you relate to this?

Are you ready to be challenged?

Knowing how popular this is, even within the Christian business community, what I'm writing about today might challenge some of you, which is good. We never grow unless we're challenged. My hope is that this message will inspire you to embrace the roles that I believe God wants us to walk

in. I think the core of this concept goes back to the message last week about becoming more and more like God and less and less like ourselves, dying to self, and becoming a new creation.

Galatians 6: 15b ... What counts is whether we have been transformed into a new creation.

As each of the disciples are introduced in the gospels, we know them as fishermen, tax collector, zealot, and the others that are seemingly ordinary men. Now that you've read the gospels and New Testament books what is your first thought when someone mentions "Peter" or "John", I'm guessing that you'd say "apostle" or "disciple of Christ" and not a "fisherman".

Matthew 4: 19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. (KJV)

No turning back

I think one of the underlying messages that is not to be overlooked is the transformation that took place in these ordinary men. They met Jesus as a "fisherman, tax collector, etc..." and after spending time with Jesus day in and day out over the course of three years they are changed individuals in every way. They were never the same again and they did not go back to what they were doing prior to meeting Jesus.

Jesus not only taught God's ways and how to live their lives, but also left them with a directive that would consume them for the rest of their lives. His last commands weren't "Live a morally successful life after I'm gone." If you can remember it was:

Matthew 28: 18 Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

It is all about the responsibility that a believer has after they've learned the good news and how they've been entrusted to teach others.

How do you identify yourself? In your heart, who are you?

How you identify yourself, in your heart, will determine how you come across to others. How you define yourself will determine your motives for serving others. For example, if I am simply a 'businessman', my objective is to make a profit, and that's my motive, but if I am a disciple of Christ first, my motive is serving others in love and loving the customer in a way that honors the Lord. I know that God is my provider, not my customer. It doesn't matter what you do, whether it be a student, mom, housewife, insurance salesman, jack of all trades, business owner, or waitress, what matters most is knowing who you are in God's eyes. Allow these verses to serve as a reminder...

1 Corinthians 6: 20 for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

Romans 8: 17 And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

Here is a great summary of both verses:

Ephesians 1: 3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual

blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. 4 Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. 5 God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. 6 So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. 7 He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. 8 He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

Isn't it great to be adopted into God's family?

From these scriptures, we can deduce that we are servants (slaves), children, brothers and sisters in Christ, heirs of the Father. All of these terms can be used at one time or another in relation to God as our identity. In many of the books of the New Testament, the authors define themselves very clearly. For example:

***James 1: 1** This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

***Jude 1: 1** This letter is from Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and a brother of James.*

Note that these are Jesus' brothers. Although they are actually half-brothers of the risen Savior, they chose to take a much more humble approach when they referred to themselves. This is a great lesson to learn.

If the brothers of Jesus were humble enough to consider themselves servants shouldn't we as well?

There's more to follow, come back next week for part 2!

Who Are You? part 2

Last week, in the first of this two-part message titled “Who Are You?”, I ended it with this sentence: *“If the brothers of Jesus were humble enough to consider themselves servants shouldn’t we as well?”*

This week I want to discuss another title that the Apostle Paul discusses in the second book of Corinthians. It’s a bit more upscale, so to speak than the lowly title of servant, but this doesn’t mean we stop being servants.

After all, the best servants make the best Ambassadors...

2 Corinthians 5: 16 So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! 17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

18 And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. 19 For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. 20 So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God!” 21 For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

When we see ourselves as ambassadors for Christ, we shouldn't concern ourselves so much about what to say to someone. What matters most is that we seek God at that moment, knowing that He will give us the words to say. He will also fill you with love that you do not have naturally when you seek Him first.

This motive and intention of serving God changes everything in the conversation. Here you are, a "servant of the Most High God", aiming to please the Father.

Remember, "whatever you do"...

Colossians 3: 23 Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.

So it's no longer "Billy the salesman, just trying to make the sale." it's "Billy the servant of God, serving the customers to meet their needs." (Perhaps the customer doesn't need the product.) And if the customer or stranger has an unbearable burden on their heart, perhaps God is giving you the opportunity to introduce them to the One who can actually meet their desperate needs, as He met yours.

Ambassadorship is a full-time (all the time) position. With this title there is no "hat" that comes off after the Sunday message. Although the auto mechanic uniform comes on Monday morning, we're still wearing the invisible ambassador cap issued by God.

Would you like to excel in this position and perhaps be a more effective ambassador?

John 15: 5 "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. *6* Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. *7* But if you remain in me and my words remain in you,

you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! 8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

Have you read the entire Ambassador Manual yet?

I've found that in any position, regardless of industry, what makes for a successful term of employment is to be very knowledgeable and understand what the employer requires, the history of the organization, and generally what makes the boss happy. I'd think to myself, *"If I can please the Boss, I'm doing OK and He'll let me keep working."*

As you know, the Master has provided for us a Manual that is timeless and very helpful when it comes to fulfilling our duties. Your performance in the role of ambassador will be greatly enhanced when you regularly seek the Father's heart through His Book. For those that need help with the Book, see below.

Just remember that the wages are good...

***John 4: 34** Then Jesus explained: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. **35** You know the saying, 'Four months between planting and harvest.' **But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. 36**The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! **37** You know the saying, 'One plants and another harvests.' And it's true. **38** I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest."*

"Oh Lord, thank you for giving us life so that we can be set free to love you and serve you and enjoy the fellowship with you that you had intended from the very beginning. Help us to

know what pleases you and teach us your ways. We want to serve you wholeheartedly Lord, please guide us in this life of service. In Jesus' name, amen"

Are You Hoping For A Breakthrough? part 2

In light of everything mentioned in the previous post, Are You Hoping For A Breakthrough? part 1, let's briefly review King David's journey to becoming king of Israel...

He was anointed by Samuel at a young age, but he wasn't crowned until the age of 30. Do you realize all that he endured throughout those years?

Hunted and harassed

He was harassed by his brothers and attacked by someone that was like a father to him. He was hunted and relentlessly pursued by the king of Israel (the same father figure, King Saul). Eventually, he had had enough to the extreme measure that he joined ranks with Israel's enemy almost fighting against his own people.

Throughout this distressing period of his life, David was given charge of hundreds of men. It started out as a small group of family and followers and later grew to be 600 prior to his reign. He did not recruit or pursue these followers, they joined him voluntarily.

It wasn't until King Saul was killed and David went through a terrifying test which proved to be his "final exam". That was arguably the most stressful test of that period of his life, when his town of Ziklag, was razed by the enemy who kidnapped

the wives and children of him and his men.

1 Samuel 30: 1 Three days later, when David and his men arrived home at their town of Ziklag, they found that the Amalekites had made a raid into the Negev and Ziklag; they had crushed Ziklag and burned it to the ground. 2 They had carried off the women and children and everyone else but without killing anyone.

This monumental test causes his most beloved followers to turn on him. Picking it up in verse 6...

6 David was now in great danger because all his men were very bitter about losing their sons and daughters, and they began to talk of stoning him.

With God's help and guidance...

But David found strength in the Lord his God.

7 Then he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring me the ephod!" So Abiathar brought it. 8 Then David asked the Lord, "Should I chase after this band of raiders? Will I catch them?"

And the Lord told him, "Yes, go after them. You will surely recover everything that was taken from you!"

They were able to retrieve their wives and children...

18 David got back everything the Amalekites had taken, and he rescued his two wives. 19 Nothing was missing: small or great, son or daughter, nor anything else that had been taken. David brought everything back. 20 He also recovered all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock. "This plunder belongs to David!" they said.

And all was restored!

(Isn't cool how God allowed him to be tested in this way, yet all was restored and no one was killed? Can you say "Hand of protection"? Note that this "hand of protection", was there not only for David, but also his followers, for David's sake.)

Shortly after this we read that David was made king. It wasn't David's decision, but the people of Judah chose him.

2 Samuel 2: 2...So David and his wives 3 and his men and their families all moved to Judah, and they settled in the villages near Hebron. 4 Then the men of Judah came to David and crowned him king over the people of Judah.

God prepared him from a small boy and now he was ready. Not only that, through this process he established solid relationships within his team that yielded an undying loyalty towards him. These same people matured as he matured and they worked together with David in his new role as king.

Don't give up hope!

This may be a good time to reflect on your own life and consider the trials and challenges you've endured. Think about how God has been molding you with skills, talents, and abilities. If you are sincerely seeking after God's heart you can be rest assured that He is preparing you for something greater, and should you persevere, God will use you in a great and mighty way!

So remember to remain faithful to the responsibility that God's already given you and thank Him for the opportunity of serving Him in that role today.

Galatians 6: ⁹ So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up.

“Dear Lord, you are good. Thank you for the wisdom you give us in serving others around us. Help us to stay focused on your Word and the daily tasks you’ve put before us. Give us the patience we need to endure so that we can excel in peace. You are so good, thank you for giving me this opportunity to serve you. In Jesus’ name, amen”

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Are You Hoping For A Breakthrough? part 1

What does it mean to give up your life?

Matthew 16: 24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. 25 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

Every time I read this I am challenged by it. Are you? What do you think about when you read this? Does it encourage you or discourage you? Or perhaps does it leave you puzzled? After all, how does one give up his life? The NASB reads “but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” How do you lose your life?

This verse has not only challenged me but for many years I was puzzled by it. The idea of losing my life flat out scared me first of all, but then again I didn’t completely understand it either. What does it mean? Does it mean to quit your job and join some monastery where you’re cloistered for the rest

of your life?

In any event, the idea never appealed to me so I simply skimmed the text without really considering it much. In other words, I kept reading to find more comforting words and pretty much ignored verses 24 and 25. That is how I used to live and still called myself a Christian. Read it again: "If any of you wants to be my follower, ..."

Am I a follower or not?

If I decide to be a follower of His, what must I do in order to lose my life?

I think perhaps John the Baptist shared some insight to this when he said:

John 3: 30 He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

I shouldn't have to state that this should be the main focus of the mature believer. We should always strive to think less and less of ourselves and more and more of Him. I think this could at least be the beginning of what "dying to self" is all about. This is when you forsake all that is precious to you, your ways, habits, desires, attitudes, dreams, and your ideas. These start to take a backseat, little by little, as we draw closer and closer to Him. It's less about me and more about Him.

As we continue to read through His Word we get more and more excited about His ways, His ideas, His attitudes, His habits, His dreams, and desires. If we allow God to work in us in this way over a period of time, persistently seeking Him, it's only a matter of time before what was important to us loses its value and we place a greater value on these things that are important to God.

This is the process of becoming one with Him and this is what Jesus modeled.

In this way, God transforms us more and more into His likeness and we become a sort of “Christ in the flesh” for those in our lives.

John 14: 8 Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

9 Jesus replied, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? 10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. 11 Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do.

And also in Colossians...

Colossians 1: 15a Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

We all know people and have loved ones who need God. They, like us, need His unconditional love, His gentleness, His kindness, His mercy, and His patience. What greater purpose or calling could we have than to become more like God so that those in our lives, who are wallowing in darkness, could get to know the living Christ through us? Isn’t this a beautiful and glorious plan? And isn’t this a great ministry in and of itself, to lead those closest to you to Christ?

Do you want more?

But some of us, including myself (at least on some days), want more. Maybe it’s more responsibility or a greater following to reach more people. As if to say “If only I had

greater audiences and be like those great preachers” or “If only I could start a soup kitchen or orphan house.” Maybe you’re hoping to start a full-time ministry. You may have envisioned your “dream ministry”, you know, the answer to the question: “If God gave you unlimited resources and your choice of how to serve Him, what would that look like?”

However you answer that question, that is what I’m referring to. I shouldn’t have to say that comparing yourself to others in ministry is never a good thing to do, but its human nature and whatever ministry works well for someone else, may not be suited for you. Only God knows how you can best be utilized and where you’ll thrive. Some dreams die hard and that takes us back to dying to self.

Are you faithful in the little things?

While many ministry dreams may be noble or God-given desires, we must know and understand God’s ways, principles, and processes of growth and responsibility.

Luke 16: 10 “If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won’t be honest with greater responsibilities. 11 And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? 12 And if you are not faithful with other people’s things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?”

Also:

Luke 12: 47 “And a servant who knows what the master wants, but isn’t prepared and doesn’t carry out those instructions, will be severely punished. 48 But someone who does not know, and then does something wrong, will be punished only lightly. When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required.”

Throughout all of Scripture God has shown time and time again that if we are faithful and obedient with the “little things”, He will reward us with greater things. He works the same today. Therefore we cannot afford to be distracted by what the future may hold in some ideal, fantasy world. We must live in the here and now, where every one of us is called to an immediate, local ministry to serve those that God entrusted to our care.

Be faithful in your immediate ministry...

You may know them as your wife, husband, son, daughter, mother, father, friend, co-worker, the neighbor across the street, or the lady at the checkout counter that God put in your life to test your patience. Believe me when I say that only when you are faithful and are found trustworthy with your immediate ministry and after a season or more of demonstrating your perseverance and patience with where you're at now, will God give you something greater, which comes with greater responsibility.

So please be careful when you ask for a greater ministry, let me advise you to come first before God and say “Only when I'm ready, Lord, if it pleases you, I'd like to serve you in a greater way, but only in your time”. Just be careful what you wish for. There are many Christian leaders over the ages that took on more responsibility before they were ready and many of them faced unnecessary failure and serve as bad examples.

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Are You Ready? part 4

In my first message of this series, "Are You Ready? part 1", I made some rather criticizing remarks about scholars who've spent vast amounts of time specifically on end-times prophecy.

We cannot afford to get distracted.

I'm not saying that it's wrong to study the end-times, but I certainly don't think it should ever be our main focus. Let's suppose, for example, that Jesus' returns next Tuesday at 6 am, sharp. For those scholars that have spent decades telling others that this would happen or that would happen and they were wrong, how could you begin to count the wasted hours of being misdirected? Not to mention the people that read their books and listened to their messages.

Do you see how a subject such as this, biblical as it is, can become a distraction? I think you can talk about the end-times without having a firm opinion on any of the main events. There is still a lot to be said about the end-times that is for our benefit but that doesn't mean we have to have it figured out. Heck, we could talk about Heaven all day long and it wouldn't get old for me, we're told to talk about such things, but it really doesn't matter to me what happens between now and then.

Just know that what God says will happen, happens.

I hope that this message (all 4 parts!) gave you a "bigger picture" about how God operates and great hope for His return. Based on the earlier passages of Scripture we can learn that God makes plans and they happen, make no mistake about it. This we can count on. If you study Revelation at all it's not hard to see God working in the world today in a way that is setting the stage for prophesied events to happen. The Bible has a lot to say about the last days and here's a good example:

2 Timothy 3: 1 You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. 2For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. 3 They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. 4 They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. 5 They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!

If there's one "message" that is emphatic, central and universal to the subject of *last days/end times/any date in the future*, it is this:

BE READY!!!

Luke 12: 35 "Be dressed for service and keep your lamps burning, 36 as though you were waiting for your master to return from the wedding feast. Then you will be ready to open the door and let him in the moment he arrives and knocks. 37 The servants who are ready and waiting for his return will be rewarded. I tell you the truth, he himself will seat them, put on an apron, and serve them as they sit and eat! 38 He may come in the middle of the night or just before dawn. But whenever he comes, he will reward the servants who are ready.

39 "Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would not permit his house to be broken into. 40 You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected."

Do you know what to do to be ready?

If at this point, you're not sure what you should be doing to "be ready" or you just want to make sure you know or maybe you're clueless. Please ask someone that you regard as godly

and trusting and they may be able to offer some guidance. You can always ask the Lord and He will direct you. Lastly, you could reply to this message and we could discuss it. Either way, I would advise you to do all that you can to be ready. As they discovered in Noah's day, just because it never rained doesn't mean that it won't!

Here's more food for thought:

***Revelation 21:** 1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

3 I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

"Oh Lord, your magnificence is breathtaking..."

You are so awesome and beautiful. I love to read your Word and marvel at the things you've done and plan to do. How can I ever thank you enough? Please help me to do that which you'd have me do. Help me to know you more so that I can be on the same page as you. I see your plans and I'd like to participate. Thank you for calling us to be your servants so that we can reside with you on that most glorious day. In Jesus' name, amen!"

Are You Ready? part 3

Thank you for staying with me for the third installment of this series, "Are You Ready?".

Last week we discussed the question that we all might have entertained at one time or another and that is "Can we really be sure there will be the second coming of Jesus?". Then I proceeded to point out some prophecies in Scripture that show a clear track record of God coming through on the promises He's made. Today I'm picking up where I left off, with more promises. I hope you'll enjoy it...

Prophecies of the coming Christ...

The Israelite's under Moses' leadership prayed for an intercessor after the terrifying experience at Mt. Sinai. An intercessor that was gentle and not as intimidating. In Deuteronomy 18, roughly 40 years later and to the second generation Moses announces that God will deliver "according to all [they] desired".

Through Moses

Deuteronomy 18: 15 Moses continued, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. 16 For this is what you yourselves requested of the Lord your God when you were assembled at Mount Sinai. You said, 'Don't let us hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore or see this blazing fire, for we will die.'

17 "Then the Lord said to me, 'What they have said is right. 18 I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him.

Through David

During David's life, he writes many Psalms, one of which is Psalm 22. Is it "just another psalm" or is there something a little special about it? Several verses stick out; I'll just use a couple:

Psalm 22:

- 16 For dogs have surrounded Me;
The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me.
They pierced My hands and My feet;*
- 17 I can count all My bones.
They look and stare at Me.*
- 18 They divide My garments among them,
And for My clothing they cast lots.*

Think of this, what did a Jewish reader think about when reading this prior to Jesus' death? "They're pretty strange verses, aren't they? Did this actually happen to David?" They might've thought and discussed. All three verses happen on the day Jesus hung on the cross. And here, about 1000 years prior, they are spoken in the present and past tense. Pretty wild eh?

Through Isaiah

Somewhere around 700 years after Moses, God asked King Ahaz to ask for a sign:

*Isaiah 7: 10 Later, the Lord sent this message to King Ahaz:
11 "Ask the Lord your God for a sign of confirmation, Ahaz.
Make it as difficult as you want—as high as heaven or as deep
as the place of the dead."*

*12 But the king refused. "No," he said, "I will not test the
Lord like that."*

*13 Then Isaiah said, "Listen well, you royal family of
David! Isn't it enough to exhaust human patience? Must you
exhaust the patience of my God as well? 14 All right then,*

the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us').

There's the sign of the coming Messiah. Over 700 years prior to Jesus' birth.

Another, of many, through Isaiah

I would be remiss if I failed to mention **Isaiah 53**:

*7 He was oppressed and treated harshly,
yet he never said a word.
He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.
And as a sheep is silent before the shearers,
he did not open his mouth.*

*8 Unjustly condemned,
he was led away.
No one cared that he died without descendants,
that his life was cut short in midstream.
But he was struck down
for the rebellion of my people.*

*9 He had done no wrong
and had never deceived anyone.
But he was buried like a criminal;
he was put in a rich man's grave.*

Need I say more? I think it speaks for itself. If you have not read this complete chapter lately, put it on your shortlist of things to read.

Aren't you just blown away with the magnificence of Scripture?

We all know the rest of the story. But isn't it quite amazing how God used so many participants throughout the ages to prophesy about the coming Messiah? I say this not only to illustrate the amazing way God works but also to consider

this: It was impossible for anyone to predict when the Messiah would come and exactly how He would appear and how His life of service would play out. No one knew and no one figured it out. Yet it was all there in the Old Testament for people to see. Only after Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection can we see how the puzzle fits together.

Do you see where I'm going with this? The scholars I mentioned above (part 1), who all have countless hours of study focused on end-times all think they have it figured out to some degree. Whether they predict a date or not, they all have theories, guesses or firm opinions on the second coming. And from one end of the spectrum to the other, there are plenty of differences between the scholars. Do they all study from the same book? I say that jokingly, but the Bible isn't just another book as we all know.

Next week I'll wrap this up and make it practical, tying it with an essential lesson as part of being a true disciple. I hope you'll stay with me!

Are You Ready? part 2

Picking up where we left off in part 1 (long, long ago) of "Are You Ready? part 1"...

There is one passage, and probably many others, that I am always drawn to when it comes to "the important matters". You know, key verses that keep us focused on the main thing. So that the "main thing" remains the "main thing", which keeps our focus where it needs to be.

What is the most necessary thing?

This is just one of those passages...

*Luke 10: 41 But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! 42 **There is only one thing worth being concerned about.** Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her."*

Jesus is referring to her sitting at His feet and listening to Him.

Here Jesus emphasizes this attitude again:

Luke 13: 22 Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he went, always pressing on toward Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few be saved?"

*He replied, 24 "Work hard to enter the narrow door to God's Kingdom, for many will try to enter but will fail. 25 When the master of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. You will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Lord, open the door for us!' But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' 26 Then you will say, 'But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' 27 And he will reply, 'I tell you, **I don't know you or where you come from.** Get away from me, all you who do evil.'*

The keywords here are "I don't know you or where you come from." which I believe indicates that our relationship with Him is much more important to Him than any work or service we perform.

Can we really be sure there will be the second coming of Jesus?

I know very well that some people may be reading this and say: "Can we really be sure there will be a second-coming of

Jesus; it's been over 2000 years since that old book has been written. How reliable can it be? Surely He would've come back by now."

Peter has a good answer to this:

*2 Peter 3: 8 But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. 9 **The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.***

If that's not enough, allow me to remind some of you of some things that will give you even greater confidence about our Lord's return. I want us to study the history of God which is always a good thing to do and will boost anyone's confidence in the Lord's return.

God foretells the 400-year era of slavery.

Consider these words God speaks to Abram (Abraham):

***Genesis 15: 13** Then the Lord said to Abram, "You can be sure that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. **14** But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and in the end they will come away with great wealth.*

Note that God says "You can be sure...". Abraham goes on to father Isaac, then comes Jacob, then Joseph, who we know gets sold as a slave and then goes on to become in charge of the entire land of Egypt, 2nd in rank only to Pharaoh. Then comes the famine that forces Jacob's sons to seek grain in Egypt

which ends with the whole family moving there. Sometime after this, we read that things change...

Exodus 1: 8 Eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. 9 He said to his people, "Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. 10 We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don't, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country."

11 So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves.

This begins their 400 years of slavery which God said "You can be sure" over 200 years prior. How's that for telling the future? Not only that, but it all comes true, God punishes Egypt with 10 horrible plagues and then He compels the Egyptians to give the Israelites gold and silver as parting gifts!

God foretells the coming of Cyrus to bring His people home.

It is believed that Isaiah the prophet lived from 778 BC to 732 BC. We know that he served Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Isaiah writes this in his 45th chapter, I highly recommend reading the entire chapter, it is a great read:

Isaiah 45:

13 I will raise up Cyrus to fulfill my righteous purpose, and I will guide his actions.

He will restore my city and free my captive people—without seeking a reward!

I, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, have spoken!"

Who is Cyrus? You might be asking. (no relation to Miley, by the way).

2 Chronicles 36: 22 In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the Lord fulfilled the prophecy he had given through Jeremiah. He stirred the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation in writing and to send it throughout his kingdom:

23 "This is what King Cyrus of Persia says:

"The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Any of you who are the Lord's people may go there for this task. And may the Lord your God be with you!"

King Cyrus became king of Persia around 538. This is roughly 200 years or more after Isaiah wrote the prophecy! It was all God's plan and that's what happened.

This is why we need to read the Bible consistently.

The more we read, the more we're reminded of what God said and that what He said will happen. This activity that we engage in, sitting at His feet and reading what He wrote, is always where our focus should be.

There's more incredible information coming in the third and final part 3, so stay tuned!

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Are You Ready? part 1

Over the ages and I think especially in the last 100 years or so there has been lots of speculation in regards to the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. The popular term scholars use to describe the subject is eschatology, which simply means the study of end-times or end-times prophecy.

Can you say Eschatology? [ˌeskəˈtäləjē]

Eschatology has been the subject of many books, movies and news stories over the last few decades. Some have even dared to put a date on Jesus' arrival. I find it ironic that the people who proclaim to know these details, the ones who seem to know all there is to know about what the Bible says regarding the end-times are the ones picking the dates when Jesus himself said this:

Matthew 24: 36 "However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows.

Of course, these scholars would be able to make the best guess, but for anyone to try to pretend to know such information is being quite presumptuous, and that's putting it nicely. Here's something we do know:

37 "When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah's day. 38 In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. 39 People didn't realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes.

Some scholars say we'll be raptured prior to the tribulation period, some say during and some say after. Some don't believe we'll be raptured at all. I used to believe strongly that

we'll be raptured prior to the tribulation. The reason I believed it is because that's just what I was taught and it seemed like a really good idea to me. I want to make it clear that my prior belief was NOT because I knew the Bible really well; honestly, I didn't read it much at all back then.

We need to be ready!

Ironically, now that I've read through the Bible several times I have no opinion. Although I had a "pre-trib" bias, I am much less certain about the events at the end of this age. This is OK with me and I am much more comfortable with my agnostic position than I was comfortable with my beliefs in a pre-tribulation rapture. What I do have a firm belief in, as I've never had before is that the second coming will happen. We need to be ready, regardless of our eschatological viewpoints, and that God cares infinitely more about our heart for Him than He does our intellectual knowledge about the end-times.

By the way, the Great Tribulation as many people like to call it comes from Daniel chapter 12, here is an excerpt, read the full chapter for more details.

the Great Tribulation

Daniel 12: 8 I heard what he said, but I did not understand what he meant. So I asked, "How will all this finally end, my lord?"

9 But he said, "Go now, Daniel, for what I have said is kept secret and sealed until the time of the end. 10 Many will be purified, cleansed, and refined by these trials. But the wicked will continue in their wickedness, and none of them will understand. Only those who are wise will know what it means.

11 "From the time the daily sacrifice is stopped and the sacrilegious object that causes desecration is set up to be worshiped, there will be 1,290 days. 12 And blessed are those

who wait and remain until the end of the 1,335 days!

13 "As for you, go your way until the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days, you will rise again to receive the inheritance set aside for you."

I believe that the study of eschatology, for some at least, has become a distraction at best and at worst an obsession (idol), which is an absolute shame. Some teachers seem to have a greater concern about when their Lord is coming back rather than enjoying the blessing of knowing Him and spending time with Him now. When we really get to know Him these details become less and less important. I enjoy discussion of these events, but they no longer dominate my thoughts.

In part 2, I'll give further reasons why we need to be ready and where our focus should lie in the meantime.

God Bless!

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Are We There Yet?

As adults, we should know better than to question how long it takes to arrive at our destination. We know that the trip is expected to be long and that we don't usually receive a detailed explanation of the journey, but we'll still question God about not arriving at our destination yet. Wait a minute, allow me to clarify, where is this destination?

The destination could be anything on which we're waiting on God for.

For example, it could be healing from an affliction, an addiction, or a behavioral change. Maybe it's the salvation of a friend or relative or waiting for an unbearable situation or circumstance to pass. In each of these cases, we are powerless. There is nothing we can do, in our own power, to heal ourselves. We can't make someone come to know Christ (although we try) and for most of our situations and circumstances, we are hopeless in our own strength.

What is it that you are waiting/praying for? Oh, you have a list? Me too.

What are we to do in the meantime, while we wait? We have many accounts in the Word of God on which people waited on God for certain things, why don't we look at a few of them and make some observations, shall we?

Genesis 12: 1 The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

This may be one of the most well-known examples of waiting so this is a fine example.

In verse 2, God starts His promise saying that He'll make Abraham into a great nation. At the time, he was 75 years old.

Genesis 15: 1 Some time later, the Lord spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great." 2 But Abram replied, "O Sovereign Lord, what good are all your blessings when I don't even have a son? Since you've given me no children, Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in my household, will inherit all my wealth. 3 You have given me no

descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir."

4 Then the Lord said to him, "No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir." 5 Then the Lord took Abram outside and said to him, "Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have!"

Are you being this honest with God, sharing your true thoughts with Him?

We are not sure how long "some time later" is, but we know it's less than ten years. We know a lot has happened since he came to the land of Canaan, so he could've been 80-85 at this point. These are such comforting words he receives from God in verse 1. But we can certainly see the frustration that Abram has in verses 2-3. He surely had his doubts, and as I can tell, he dismissed the idea of having his own son. Then in verse 4 God contradicts him and sets him straight.

That brings us to this key verse:

6 And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.

Abram was counted righteous because he believed, not because of anything he had done, but because he chose to trust in the Lord.

Genesis 16: *1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not been able to bear children for him. But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, "The Lord has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her." And Abram agreed with Sarai's proposal. 3 So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan.)*

Here we see the two of them, Abram and Sarai coming up with their own solution. This is their efforts to fulfill God's promise. Abram was 86 when Hagar's son was born, verse 16.

Abram's 99, are we there yet?

Genesis 17: 1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am El-Shaddai—'God Almighty.' Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. 2 I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to give you countless descendants."

Despite Abram taking things into his own hands, God is still faithful to him. Notice the instruction given: Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life.

15 Then God said to Abraham, "Regarding Sarai, your wife—her name will no longer be Sarai. From now on her name will be Sarah. 16 And I will bless her and give you a son from her! Yes, I will bless her richly, and she will become the mother of many nations. Kings of nations will be among her descendants."

17 Then Abraham bowed down to the ground, but he laughed to himself in disbelief. "How could I become a father at the age of 100?" he thought. "And how can Sarah have a baby when she is ninety years old?" 18 So Abraham said to God, "May Ishmael live under your special blessing!"

Abraham still doesn't get it.

He thinks that Ishmael is the promised son. So again, God contradicts him in verse 19:

19 But God replied, "No—Sarah, your wife, will give birth to a son for you. You will name him Isaac, and I will confirm my covenant with him and his descendants as an everlasting covenant."

And then finally, 25 years after the initial promise, Abraham receives the promised son.

Genesis 21: 1 The Lord kept his word and did for Sarah exactly what he had promised. 2 She became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would. 3 And Abraham named their son Isaac. 4 Eight days after Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded. 5 Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born.

A lot happened in those 25 years and there were times of belief and unbelief, but God promised, and it was never about Abraham's ability to do anything or being perfect, even when he had his own solution. This is all about the greatness of God.

God delivers on what He's promised.

And then there's the story of Hannah, mother of Samuel:

1 Samuel 1: 2 Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not.

... 6 So Peninnah would taunt Hannah and make fun of her because the Lord had kept her from having children. 7 Year after year it was the same—Peninnah would taunt Hannah as they went to the Tabernacle. Each time, Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not even eat.

After many years, Hannah prays this prayer:

9 Once after a sacrificial meal at Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to pray. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance of the Tabernacle. 10 Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord. 11 And she made this vow: "O Lord of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a

son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the Lord, his hair will never be cut."

""

19 The entire family got up early the next morning and went to worship the Lord once more. Then they returned home to Ramah. When Elkanah slept with Hannah, the Lord remembered her plea, 20 and in due time she gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I asked the Lord for him."

Would you devote your son to the Lord?

This is another great story of someone that waited on God and God came through for her. It doesn't appear that God ever promised her a son as He did Abraham, but I think the key here is in her prayer. She devotes her son in advance, saying that she will give him back to God. It's a huge sacrifice for her to make and it was done in faith. Samuel turns out to be a great man of God, which blesses the entire nation and God blesses Hannah in return:

20 Before they returned home, Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, "May the Lord give you other children to take the place of this one she gave to the Lord." 21 And the Lord gave Hannah three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.

I think the key to Hannah's story is that she persevered and went to God in her great anguish. And because of her great devotion and sacrifice to God, He was able to use her immensely through her son Samuel.

Here's an example of what not to do:

1 Samuel: 13: Meanwhile, Saul stayed at Gilgal, and his men were trembling with fear. 8 Saul waited there seven days

for Samuel, as Samuel had instructed him earlier, but Samuel still didn't come. Saul realized that his troops were rapidly slipping away. 9 So he demanded, "Bring me the burnt offering and the peace offerings!" And Saul sacrificed the burnt offering himself.

10 Just as Saul was finishing with the burnt offering, Samuel arrived. Saul went out to meet and welcome him, 11 but Samuel said, "What is this you have done?"

Saul replied, "I saw my men scattering from me, and you didn't arrive when you said you would, and the Philistines are at Micmash ready for battle. 12 So I said, 'The Philistines are ready to march against us at Gilgal, and I haven't even asked for the Lord's help!' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering myself before you came."

13 "How foolish!" Samuel exclaimed. "You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. Had you kept it, the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 But now your kingdom must end, for the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart. The Lord has already appointed him to be the leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."

In verse 8 we see King Saul gripped with fear. This fear eroded any faith he'd had. Saul chose to focus on the enemy and what they were doing while he should've been holding fast to Samuel's instructions and waiting.

Psalms 37

A psalm of David.

***1 Don't worry about the wicked
or envy those who do wrong.***

2 For like grass, they soon fade away.

Like spring flowers, they soon wither.

3 Trust in the Lord and do good.

Then you will live safely in the land and prosper.

4 Take delight in the Lord,

and he will give you your heart's desires.

5 Commit everything you do to the Lord.

Trust him, and he will help you.

6 He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn,

and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun.

7 Be still in the presence of the Lord,

and wait patiently for him to act.

Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes.

We looked at 3 different characters in 3 entirely different circumstances and they each have their own unique lessons. I pray that God spoke to you in some way as you read this message.

Isaiah 40:

28 Have you never heard?

Have you never understood?

The Lord is the everlasting God,

the Creator of all the earth.

He never grows weak or weary.

No one can measure the depths of his understanding.

***29 He gives power to the weak
and strength to the powerless.***

***30 Even youths will become weak and tired,
and young men will fall in exhaustion.***

***31 But those who trust in the Lord will find
new strength.***

***They will soar high on wings like eagles.
They will run and not grow weary.
They will walk and not faint.***

I know this was just 3 examples of people waiting on God. If you'd like to analyze more, would you let me know?

"Dear Lord, I will trust in you. Although sometimes I lack faith and the circumstances at times look bleak, you are good and I will rejoice in you regardless because I know that you have great plans for us and that you are preparing us for your purposes. Thank you for these encouraging and revealing stories from your Word. You are a great and loving God and I am privileged to be your servant. In Jesus' name, amen."

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Have You Had Enough?

Let's face it, life is filled with frustrations and pressure seems to come from all angles. These might include IRS notices, bill collectors, family issues, politics in the workplace, betrayal of friends, health issues, destructive and uncontrollable behaviors, lawsuits, and last but not least

bounced checks.

Have I hit a nerve yet?

Life is messy and can be very unfair. Most of us start with such high expectations of life and I believe this is where much of the problem lies. Now that I know what I know, at 50+ years of age, I don't think growing up with fairy tales, Disney movies, and cartoons is such a good idea.

I'm no psychologist, but it doesn't take a genius to figure out that whatever we fill our minds with is what forms these unrealistic expectations. Does the saying "garbage in, garbage out" ring a bell? The problem with children is that they don't know what reality really is. They are still trying to figure things out, but whatever their minds process gets stored and it has a lasting effect.

So here I am today, an adult, with unrealistic expectations trying to figure things out and constantly disappointed. The dream house, car, spouse and job are nowhere to be seen. The idea of retirement still motivates many people, but that is no longer looking probable for many.

John 16: 33 I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

Reading this verse tells us a lot. Jesus tells us things so that we can have peace in Him. We will have trials and sorrows. And we can have confidence because Jesus has overcome the world.

Compare the truth we just read from the John 16 verse above with "...and they lived happily ever after."

Do you see the problem with this?

Regardless of where we got our expectations, we all experience

trials and have to deal with life as it plays out. So what about you?

Have you had enough?

Are you about ready to “throw in the towel”? (It’s OK, keep reading!)

It seems that God allows ourselves to reach these most frustrating times so that we in some way reach a “breaking point”. You can probably relate, this is when everything seems to be going wrong, the world conspires against you, and the pressure builds up and it leads us to either burst into tears of uncontrollable sobbing or shout out in a fit of rage, or both.

We can only handle so much and after allowing things to get to us, there is the “straw that breaks the camel’s back” and that’s when we let it go. Can anyone relate to this, or is this just me? When we come to God for help in these times I think we are exactly where He wants us to be, which is fully surrendered.

The fact is that we are powerless (without Jesus)

For many of us, after years of thinking we had things under control and that we didn’t require anyone’s assistance, we came to realize that we really needed God’s help and that led us to humble ourselves and cry out to Him:

Exodus 2: 23 Years passed, and the king of Egypt died. But the Israelites continued to groan under their burden of slavery. They cried out for help, and their cry rose up to God. 24 God heard their groaning, and he remembered his covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 25 He looked down on the people of Israel and knew it was time to act.

This is where God steps in and starts to work.

We reach a place of brokenness and I think this is necessary or a normal course of action in which God uses to work in our lives. I've reached several breaking points with tears and they end up being times of healing and end with a great sense of peace on the other side.

Let's examine a few characters in the Word of God who have reached a breaking point and see what God's response was and where it led, shall we?

Exodus 5: 19 The Israelite foremen could see that they were in serious trouble when they were told, "You must not reduce the number of bricks you make each day." 20 As they left Pharaoh's court, they confronted Moses and Aaron, who were waiting outside for them. 21 The foremen said to them, "May the Lord judge and punish you for making us stink before Pharaoh and his officials. You have put a sword into their hands, an excuse to kill us!"

22 Then Moses went back to the Lord and protested, "Why have you brought all this trouble on your own people, Lord? Why did you send me? 23 Ever since I came to Pharaoh as your spokesman, he has been even more brutal to your people. And you have done nothing to rescue them!"

This was a particularly bad day in Moses' life. It seemed that what he was doing was backfiring against the Israelites. Moses could not do a thing about it, except take it back to God, the One who sent him there, to begin with. Notice that he is very direct with God and he doesn't hold anything back, including God's call to send him in the first place. Also, as far as he was concerned, God had done nothing so far towards releasing the people.

What was God's response?

Exodus 6: 1 Then the Lord told Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh. When he feels the force of my strong hand, he will let the people go. In fact, he will force them to leave his land!"

2 And God said to Moses, "I am Yahweh—'the Lord.' 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El-Shaddai—'God Almighty'— but I did not reveal my name, Yahweh, to them. 4 And I reaffirmed my covenant with them. Under its terms, I promised to give them the land of Canaan, where they were living as foreigners. 5 You can be sure that I have heard the groans of the people of Israel, who are now slaves to the Egyptians. And I am well aware of my covenant with them.

In verse 1 God explains to Moses that it was all part of His plan so that "he will force them to leave his land!" And then God makes it clear who He is, the same God as his ancestors and He reaffirms the covenant.

Now let's look at Elijah:

After winning the contest on Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal, Jezebel threatens his life...

1 Kings 19: 1 When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. 2 So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: "May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them."

3 Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. 4 Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died."

He had had enough.

You see, even this great prophet and man of God had a breaking point. From this point, the Lord feeds and restores him and is then led to Mount Sinai where God teaches him a few things.

And then there's Job:

Job 3: 1 At last Job spoke, and he cursed the day of his birth. 2 He said:

*3 "Let the day of my birth be erased,
and the night I was conceived.*

*4 Let that day be turned to darkness.
Let it be lost even to God on high,
and let no light shine on it.*

Of course, after having lost everything, Job goes on and on in utter agony, understandably. He doesn't know why the tragedy (read chapters 1 and 2) happened to him and he wants answers. Sound familiar?

Finally, after an unspecified amount of time, God responds...

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?"

Job 38

1 Then the Lord answered Job from the whirlwind:

*2 "Who is this that questions my wisdom
with such ignorant words?"*

*3 Brace yourself like a man,
because I have some questions for you,
and you must answer them.*

*4 "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?
Tell me, if you know so much.*

*5 Who determined its dimensions
and stretched out the surveying line?*

*6 What supports its foundations,
and who laid its cornerstone*

*7 as the morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted for joy?*

Notice how God puts Job in his place right away, as if to say: "I am the Creator of all things, and you are a mere human" God goes on and on to set His servant straight, bringing Job to this conclusion:

"I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance."

Job 42

1 Then Job replied to the Lord:

*2 "I know that you can do anything,
and no one can stop you.*

*3 You asked, 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such
ignorance?'*

*It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about,
things far too wonderful for me.*

*4 You said, 'Listen and I will speak!
I have some questions for you,
and you must answer them.'*

*5 I had only heard about you before,
but now I have seen you with my own eyes.*

*6 I take back everything I said,
and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance."*

Through Job's trials and sorrows, he questions God and really wrestles with his circumstances and why God allowed it. Ultimately it all leads to his repentance and Job takes back everything he said. Through these trials and sorrows, he becomes a changed man, true transformation (even in the Old Testament!).

Although he was the most righteous man in all the land (Chapter 1), he had only heard about God before. But now, after going through a tragic sequence of events and the dialog with his friends and Maker, he has seen God with his own eyes.

Without his trials, would he have had a chance to get to know God in such a personal manner?

Psalm 50

*14 Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God,
and keep the vows you made to the Most High.*

*15 Then call on me when you are in trouble,
and I will rescue you,
and you will give me glory.”*

And then there's Jeremiah

For those that have read about Jeremiah, you know the trials he endured, check out this plea in chapter 15:

Jeremiah 15: *15 Then I said,*

“Lord, you know what's happening to me.

Please step in and help me. Punish my persecutors!

Please give me time; don't let me die young.

It's for your sake that I am suffering.

16 When I discovered your words, I devoured them.

They are my joy and my heart's delight,

for I bear your name,

O Lord God of Heaven's Armies.

17 I never joined the people in their merry feasts.

I sat alone because your hand was on me.

I was filled with indignation at their sins.

18 Why then does my suffering continue?

Why is my wound so incurable?

Your help seems as uncertain as a seasonal brook,

like a spring that has gone dry.”

This sounds like a typical prayer, doesn't it? Can you relate to this? “I've done all these good things, and you still allow me to suffer?” I think he crossed the line, however, at the end of verse 18. Then God responds...

Here it comes...

19 This is how the Lord responds:

*“If you return to me, I will restore you
so you can continue to serve me.*

*If you speak good words rather than worthless ones,
you will be my spokesman.*

*You must influence them;
do not let them influence you!*

*20 They will fight against you like an attacking army,
but I will make you as secure as a fortified wall of bronze.*

*They will not conquer you,
for I am with you to protect and rescue you.*

I, the Lord, have spoken!

*21 Yes, I will certainly keep you safe from these wicked men.
I will rescue you from their cruel hands.”*

God has a great way of putting Jeremiah in his place, then gives Him great instruction and ends up by encouraging him.

Notice that in neither of these responses does God give a direct answer to the questions He's asked. Nor does He respond to the ignorant accusations. He always offers something that brings conviction, builds up, comforts, encourages and is instructional. He doesn't get into arguments with His servants, nor defend His decisions. He does things His way, which are always right and it is our decision to work with Him or against Him. It is our responsibility to allow Him to change our lives and transform us so that we work with His perfect plan through our daily surrender, not fight against it.

*Matthew 12: 30 “Anyone who isn't with me opposes me, and
anyone who isn't working with me is actually working against
me.*

And Jesus illustrates this Himself in the garden just prior to

His own trial:

Luke 22: 42 "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."

On that note, I will leave you with these last few verses...

Philippians 1: 29 For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him.

Galatians 6: 9 So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up.

Romans 5: 3 We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. 4 And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. 5 And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

Revelation 3: 10 "Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world.

"Dear Lord, your Word is precious. Thank you for revealing yourself and your very nature in these passages we've read. You give us understanding and help us to know you more. This will help us to be more faithful to you. For we know that your plans for us are good and that you have a great purpose through these trials which we endure. Thank you for these trials and for what you are doing in our lives through them. You are a great and masterful God. We love you and give you

all the praise, in His name, amen."

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